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request is directed serves upon the requesting party a sworn statement either denying specifically the matters of which an admission is requested or setting forth in detail the reasons why the party cannot truthfully either admit or deny such matters. Copies of requests for admission and answers thereto shall be served on all parties. Any admission made by a party to such request is only for the purposes of the pending proceeding, or any proceeding or action instituted for the enforcement of any order entered therein, and shall not constitute an admission by the party for any other purpose or be used against the party in any other proceeding or action.

[35 FR 10760, July 2, 1970, as amended at 51 FR 10386, Mar. 26, 1986]

§ 18b.57 Evidence.

Irrelevant, immaterial, unreliable, and unduly repetitious evidence will be excluded.

§ 18b.58 Cross-examination.

A witness may be cross-examined on any matter material to the proceeding without regard to the scope of his direct examination.

§ 18b.59 Unsponsored written material.

Letters expressing views or urging action and other unsponsored written material regarding matters in issue in a hearing will be placed in the correspondence section of the docket of the proceeding. These data are not deemed part of the evidence or record in the hearing.

§ 18b.60 Objections.

Objections to evidence shall be timely and briefly state the ground relied upon.

§ 18b.61 Exceptions to rulings of presiding officer unnecessary.

Exceptions to rulings of the presiding officer are unnecessary. It is sufficient that a party, at the time the ruling of the presiding officer is sought, makes known the action which the party desires the presiding officer to take, or the party's objection to an action

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taken, and the party's grounds therefor.

[35 FR 10760, July 2, 1970, as amended at 51 FR 10386, Mar. 26, 1986]

§ 18b.62 Official notice.

Where official notice is taken or is to be taken of a material fact not appearing in the evidence of record, any party, on timely request, shall be afforded an opportunity to show the contrary.

§ 18b.63 Public document items.

Whenever there is offered (in whole or in part) a public document, such as an official report, decision, opinion, or published scientific or economic statistical data issued by any of the executive departments (or their subdivisions), legislative agencies or committees, or administrative agencies of the Federal Government (including Government-owned corporations), or a similar document issued by a State or its agencies, and such document (or part thereof) has been shown by the offeror to be reasonably available to the public, such document need not be produced or marked for identification, but may be offered for official notice, as a public document item by specifying the document or relevant part thereof.

§ 18b.64 Offer of proof.

An offer of proof made in connection with an objection taken to any ruling of the presiding officer rejecting or excluding proffered oral testimony shall consist of a statement of the substance of the evidence which counsel contends would be adduced by such testimony; and, if the excluded evidence consists of evidence in documentary or written form or of reference to documents or records, a copy of such evidence shall be marked for identification and shall accompany the record as the offer of proof.

§ 18b.65 Appeals from ruling of presiding officer.

Rulings of the presiding officer may not be appealed to the reviewing authority prior to consideration of the entire proceeding except with the consent of the presiding officer and where the reviewing authority certifies on

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the record or in writing that the allowance of an interlocutory appeal is clearly necessary to prevent exceptional delay, expense, or prejudice to any party, or substantial detriment to the public interest. If an appeal is allowed, any party may file a brief with the reviewing authority within such period as the presiding officer directs. No oral argument will be heard unless the reviewing authority directs otherwise. At any time prior to submission of the proceeding to the reviewing authority for decision, the reviewing authority may direct the presiding officer to certify any question or the entire record to the reviewing authority for decision. Where the entire record is so certified, the presiding officer shall recommend a decision.

[35 FR 10760, July 2, 1970, as amended at 51 FR 10386, Mar. 26, 1986]

THE RECORD

§ 18b.66 Official transcript.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will designate the official reporter for all hearings. The official transcripts of testimony taken, together with any exhibits, briefs, or memoranda of law filed therewith shall be filed with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Transcripts of testimony in hearings may be obtained from the official reporter by the parties and the public at rates not to exceed the maximum rates fixed by the contract between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the reporter. Upon notice to all parties, the presiding officer may authorize corrections to the transcript which involve matters of substance.

§ 18b.67 Record for decision.

The transcript of testimony, exhibits, and all papers and requests filed in the proceedings, except the correspondence section of the docket, including rulings and any recommended or initial decision shall constitute the exclusive record for decision.

POSTHEARING PROCEDURES; DECISIONS

§ 18b.70 Posthearing briefs; proposed findings and conclusions.

(a) The presiding officer shall fix the time for filing posthearing briefs,

which may contain proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law, and, if permitted, reply briefs.

(b) Briefs should include a summary of the evidence relied upon together with references to exhibit numbers and pages of the transcript, with citations of authorities relied upon.

§ 18b.71 Decisions following hearing.

When the time for submission of posthearing briefs has expired, the presiding officer shall certify the entire record, including recommended findings and proposed decision, to the reviewing authority; or if so authorized shall make an initial decision. A copy of the recommended findings and proposed decision, or of the initial decision, shall be served upon all parties, and amici, if any.

[35 FR 10760, July 2, 1970, as amended at 51 FR 10386, Mar. 26, 1986]

§ 18b.72 Exceptions to initial or recommended decisions.

Within 20 days after the mailing of an initial or recommended decision, any party may file exceptions to the decision, stating reasons therefor, with the reviewing authority. Any other party may file a response thereto within 30 days after the mailing of the decision. Upon the filing of such exceptions, the reviewing authority shall review the decision and issue its own decision thereon.

§ 18b.73 Final decisions.

(a) Where the hearing is conducted by a hearing examiner who makes an initial decision, if no exceptions thereto are filed within the 20-day period specified in § 18b.72, such decision shall become the final decision of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and shall constitute "final agency action" within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. 704 (formerly section 10(c) of the Administrative Procedure Act), subject to the provisions of § 18b.75.

(b) Where the hearing is conducted by an administrative law judge who makes a recommended decision or upon the filing of exceptions to an administrative law judge's initial decision, the reviewing authority shall review the recommended or initial decision and shall issue a decision thereon, which